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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [TI](#)

SUBJECT: TAJIK GOVERNMENT BLOCKS WEBSITES, THEN BACKS DOWN

¶1. (SBU) On January 11, the Tajik government ordered Internet providers to block access to two Internet news sites: [centrasia.ru](#) and [ariana.su](#). The providers immediately implemented the order. The next day, the sites were back up. The brief blocks are a sign that government would like to silence dissent amidst its propaganda campaign to raise money for its Roghun hydroelectric dam project, but is wary of triggering international criticism.

¶2. (SBU) [Ariana.su](#) is considered an opposition website and features views critical of the Tajik government. [Centrasia.ru](#) is arguably the most comprehensive open source for information on Central Asia and features a wide range of news, analysis, and opinion on the entire region.

¶3. (SBU) The content and source of the order to block the sites are unclear. State Internet company "Tajik Telecom" reported to the Russian Interfax news agency that they received a letter from the government listing the websites to be blocked. Reuters reported that Internet providers received a letter directing them to block sites that criticize the president or provide uncensored fora to readers. Officials at the presidential administration's information-analysis center deny that the government issued any such order. Internet companies contacted by Public Affairs staff reported that they received an order to block the sites "from above", but would not provide further details. Tajik Telecom reported to BBC that on the evening of January 11 "regulatory bodies called us and said the decision to block the websites had been cancelled. We did what the leadership told us to do."

¶4. (SBU) Karshibaev, head of the national association of independent Tajik journalists, "Nansmit", called the website blockages a violation of human rights and media freedom. During the website blockage, NANSMIT said it planned to issue a joint statement with local media NGOs protesting the government's move. The two blocked websites were among five sites the government blocked in 2006 before the presidential election ([centrasia.ru](#), [arianastorm.com](#), [ferghana.ru](#), [tajikistantimes.ru](#), [charogiruz.ru](#)). Of these five, the government un-blocked the first three after the 2006 elections when Rahmon was re-elected with minimal opposition. The two websites that the government never un-blocked, [tajikistantimes.ru](#) and [charogiruz.ru](#), have since ceased operation.

¶5. (SBU) COMMENT: The brief blocking of [centrasia.ru](#) and [ariana.su](#) is another sign that the Tajik government is moving backwards in its respect for media freedom. Amidst its national propaganda campaign to browbeat the population to buy Roghun

stock and in advance of parliamentary elections, the government seeks to maintain a monopoly on public debate. In this case, it is unclear whether media providers took a government order too far and were pulled back or the government got cold feet when the story hit the international press so quickly. Post will continue to monitor website access and report on any future blocks. END COMMENT

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